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Francis P. Gilmore

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James P. Munroe
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THE PROFESSION OF TEACHING

One of the most painful things to the student of education is the wide difference between the high results of public school teaching which he believes to be practicable and the actual achievements of the usual public school. Theoretically, free public education should be the supreme force in every community: practically, it is not. Theoretically, the extension of such education should be followed by a higher political morality and a deeper sense of social responsibility: practically, it is not. Theoretically, the teacher — spiritual or temporal — should be honored above all other men: practically, he is not. Who is to blame? In part, the parent, for neglecting to take active interest in the work and standing of public schools; in part, the community, for giving grudgingly toward education and refusing due support and honor to those who teach; but, most of all, the teachers themselves and the colleges of arts and sciences, for failing to regard teaching as the most important and honorable of all professions.

It is, indeed, the exceptional teacher — outside the faculties of colleges — who seriously looks upon himself as a professional man. The ordinary schoolmaster has little of the personal weight, of the sense of professional responsibility, of what may be called the corporate self-respect of the lawyer, the physician, or the engineer. The traditions of the teaching guild do not yet demand a wide education, a slow and laborious preparation, a careful and humble apprenticeship, such as are required for entrance into the really learned professions. A broad education and the poise of mind which follows it are the vital needs of a great

majority of the public school teachers of to-day. They are ceaselessly complaining of a condition of things which is indeed grievous, but which is largely of their own creation. They demand high place without qualifying themselves to hold high place; they rebel at a not uncommon attitude of contempt or of contemptuous toleration on the part of the public, but do not purge themselves of the elements which excite that contempt; they accuse the parents and the public of indifference toward their work, but do little to render that work of such quality as to forbid indifference.

There is no reason — except in negligent custom, in which the majority of teachers and practically all of the colleges acquiesce — why the man or woman who has charge of the mental growth of the child should be satisfied with a training less thorough than that of the physician who cares for his body, the lawyer who manages his property, or the clergyman who ministers to his soul. It is idle to claim, as is sometimes done, that there is no profession for the teacher to study, that the art of teaching comes by nature, and that, if there be a sort of science of education, it will filter out from the errors and successes of experience. The body of the law is but a record of human experiments and mistakes in social order. Medicine itself is but the crystallized result — always recrystallizing — of centuries of empiricism, often disastrous, upon the human constitution. Engineering, founded though it be upon a science so exact as mathematics, is the net result of an infinite number of blundering attempts to solve the problems of matter and of motion. But the fact that these professions and the sciences upon which they rest are always undergoing change, that often the accepted truth of to-day is the proved fallacy of to-morrow, does not lessen their dignity, does not discourage their followers from long years of preparation for

them, does not justify the men of those professions in working by rule-of-thumb methods and haphazard guesses when it is possible, through study, experimentation, and mutual enlightenment, to work by known laws, in orderly sequence, toward well-defined ends. There is abundant foundation for a science and art of education as elaborate and dignified as that of medicine ; but the science and art will not develop so long as it is regarded as possible and natural to admit half-taught girls and youths, or those who follow teaching only as a temporary means of livelihood, to full fellowship with thoroughly educated, professional teachers. Neither will this science and this art emerge into professional dignity until the colleges and the professional schools define them, co-ordinate the subjects of study upon which they are based, and place the " Graduate in Education " upon the high plane of the Doctor of Medicine and the Bachelor of Law.

Were there, however, no well-defined science and art of education, abundant reason would still remain why the public school-teacher, quite as much as the college professor, should be soundly and broadly trained in a range of study and thought far beyond the topics that he teaches. For it is the personality of the man, the breadth of his grasp of life, and the atmosphere which he creates and maintains in his school-room that, more than anything else, secure his success in teaching and really develop his pupils. These qualities can be secured, in general, only by a sound and extensive education.

No teacher has a right to lament the blindness of the public toward the value of his work who has not fitted himself in the highest measure really to be an educator. No body of teachers may honestly " resolve " for greater recognition and consideration from others unless they are

themselves doing yeoman work toward raising the standards of preparation and attainment within their own profession. So long as low ideals of school work, routine instruction, and aimless methods — to say nothing of political interference — are tolerated by the teachers themselves, the schools and those who conduct them will fail of due honor and support, will fall far short of their possible efficiency, and will not take their rightful place as the supreme uplifting force of every democratic community.

If it be deemed necessary that the professions of law and medicine should be governed by the strictest rules, should frame elaborate codes of ethics, should have only the highest and purest aims, purging themselves of all shysters, jerry-builders, and quacks, how infinitely more important that this profession of teaching, the work of which is greater, higher, nobler than any of those others, should be regarded, too, as a sacred guild into which no traffickers or triflers be allowed to come, concerning whose work none but him who knows should have anything to say, whose sole aim should be to make of every child of the millions under its care the very most that can be made.

Certain stock arguments are always brought forward against the possibility of such high professional standards. The pitifully poor rewards, the uncertainty of tenure, the often anomalous social position of the teacher,— all these and many similar disadvantages are advanced as reasons why it is not worth while to attempt to raise the present standards of attainment. The hosts of glib pretenders, the arrogance of ignorant school committees, a cheap and noisy commercialism, are, it is said, insurmountable obstacles to the creation of a generally high, fine conception of teaching such as exists among a few devoted, really educated schoolmasters. A man who adopts the work of teaching must

have, we are told, something of the martyr spirit; for this profession has in it an element of self-sacrifice which the other high vocations do not demand. Truly, the work of the teacher does involve much sacrifice of self; but it meets with immediate and tangible reward in the uplifted lives of the children for whom the sacrifice is made. This is a return which even the profession of the clergy rarely sees. Moreover, were the majority of those who teach broadly educated men and women, were there an *esprit de corps* among them such as is found in every other profession, the petty things of teaching, which now so often overshadow the great things, would disappear and the rewards, both material and insubstantial, would be vastly increased. Rights and privileges would then be eagerly offered where now they are clamored for in vain.

The education of the teacher — whether he is to deal with infants or with collegians — should be as nearly as possible like the best training given to the young physician. He should have, in the first place, a general education so thorough and well balanced that he may be able to deal wisely, as the physician is called upon to deal, with those problems of character, those perversions of mind and morals, those subtle diseases of the will which no medicine and no surgeon's knife can reach. Having made himself thus a broad man, a proper counsellor, the young teacher must next, as does the medical student, become familiar with the technical details of his profession, learn what is known of the mental growth and reactive processes of children, study the laws of mental health, the modes of its preservation, the methods of stimulating mind and soul, the effects, good and bad, of association, what one might call, in short, the pathology of childhood and adolescence. More than this, he should make himself, as far as can be

done theoretically, master of the details of the school-room. Next, just as the medical student takes his course in the hospitals, the teacher must secure actual, hard practice in teaching, with pupils of many sorts and conditions. And, finally, throughout his whole professional preparation he must make a careful analytical and philosophical study of the history of education.

What, beyond anatomy and physiology and laboratory work, is the three or four years' course of the medical student except a study, under guidance, of the history of medicine, of the record of human experience concerning the treatment of disease, concerning the preservation of health? When a young worker in the hospitals meets new symptoms, does he guess at the disease which they denote, does he experiment first with one drug and then with another in the hope that he may hit upon something suited to the emergency? Absurd supposition! Yet that is what teachers are doing every day. A new child comes to them whose moral habit and intellectual reaction indicate disease, or lack of normal susceptibility to education. Immediately the average teacher runs through his small record of experience to ascertain if he has had a pupil of such kind before. Finding in his memory a case having somewhat similar features, he at once decides that the disease is due to the same conditions, and must be treated in a similar way. If, after a few weeks' trial, it is evident that the treatment is not successful, he tries another moral and intellectual medicine, or, more probably, gives the case up and subjects the pupil to the general routine discipline and mental diet which have been prescribed, in a rule-of-thumb fashion, for the average, normal boy or girl. As a result, his patient dies,— not, unfortunately, in the flesh, but, what is worse, in the spirit; and one more vic-

tim is added to those slain, with the best intentions, by pedagogical malpractice.

When the physician, on the contrary, meets obscure symptoms, he goes at once to his record of other men's experience, to his authoritative books, his latest medical journals, his older colleagues. With their help he makes diagnosis of the disease and learns the manner of treatment approved by experience and analogy. Or, if the patient is in good health and desires to perpetuate that happy state, the physician, having made careful study of the diet and exercise suited to that man's condition, gives him proper advice. In the manner of the doctor the good teacher should regard every pupil as a patient,— either as a well one to be kept in health and to be helped to grow to his fullest stature; or as a sick one, to be physicked and nursed back, if possible, to mental and moral well-being. Every well-trained teacher ought, as a matter of course, thus to individualize and treat his pupils; his professional instinct should impel him to it; he should find delight, as the physician does, in the mere act of healing, in the power and influence that his skill has given him. Such a schoolmaster, provided he have the teaching enthusiasm,— just as the successful medical man must have the healing fervor,— will never question the wisdom of his choice of a profession; for he will know that he is doing the best and most enduring work which is in the power of any man to do.

A thorough education, then, the breadth that follows it, and a professional consciousness and pride are what the public and private schools must demand in their teachers if those schools are to achieve real educational development. But these essential things the majority of teachers cannot and will not secure until the colleges and universities not only freely, but enthusiastically co-operate with them, until

it is made not simply possible, but absolutely necessary for every teacher to have been well taught. In failing to recognize their responsibility in this matter, the higher institutions have done the community and themselves uncounted injury: first, by fostering the all too prevalent notion that anybody can teach, thereby impairing the dignity and standing of their own faculties; secondly, by leaving the preparatory training of their college students practically in the hands of amateurs, thereby vastly diminishing the intellectual and moral efficiency of those young men and women; and, thirdly, by permitting many boys and girls eminently fitted for collegiate work to be turned aside from all thought of going to college by the dulness and unintelligence of elementary teachers, one of whose chief duties should have been to discover and to encourage those youth who are worth a higher education. On grounds of pure utility, therefore, to say nothing of their moral obligations as leaders of thought and promoters of social good, the colleges ought to make it their chief business to prepare men and women for this work of teaching, — this work which lies at the fountain-head of their own usefulness as well as of the welfare of society.

Twenty-five years ago it would have been impossible for a college, even had its faculty perceived the need, to offer a distinctive course for teachers and to rank the graduates of such a course with those in medicine and law. The public, the school managers, the teachers themselves, with rare exceptions, would have been cold, if not indeed scornful, toward such an exaltation of the schoolmaster. To-day, however, conditions are vastly changed, and increasing numbers of thoughtful men and women perceive that in this direction lies at least a partial solution of the vexed questions of public education. That "psychological moment," which

institutions as well as governments must await, has arrived. What would have seemed preposterous a quarter of a century ago is to-day not only natural, but inevitable; and those colleges which hesitate to meet this demand of the times will fail of a duty and an opportunity.

Fortunately, the step is not a difficult one. Whether it be a college of arts or one of sciences, the resources are already at hand with which to initiate the real professional training of teachers and from which to build up step by step (as training for all the professions has been tentatively evolved) the established and recognized qualifications of the expert teacher. The colleges of arts have, and the colleges of science should have, their philosophical and historical faculties so organized that the special training of the teacher in those directions can be easily begun and fully, though of course slowly, developed. All college teaching should in these days be so firmly based upon the laboratory principle that the establishment of new research laboratories of psychology and new practice laboratories of methods ought to be a matter of no great difficulty. And, aside from these purely technical facilities, the teacher, were he recognized — as too often he is not — as a serious person striving really to fit himself for a lifelong profession, should have no difficulty in gaining from any good college, whether he pursue the older courses of the classics or the newer researches of the sciences, that breadth, poise, and sanity of mind without which an educator, though he be skilled in all the devices of pedagogics and intricacies of methods, is not fit to have charge of any boy or girl.

Every year shows increasing dissatisfaction with the results of the public schools, not because those schools are deteriorating,— on the contrary, they are almost everywhere improving,— but because every year there is more general

appreciation of the fact that genuine public education implies something more and better than a mere routine of lessons. To this discontent are due that restless experimenting upon the schools, that loud demand for reforms in school government and for changes in school methods, and that ceaseless arguing over "content," "correlation," and a hundred other shibboleths of teaching, which seem sometimes to have converted the common schools into mere battle-grounds for theorists.

None of these earnestly striven for reforms, however, will be permanent in its effects until it is recognized by the public, by the normal schools, by the colleges, and by the teachers themselves, that education, especially in the case of children, is almost wholly a question of personal relations; that it is the teachers, much more than their methods, which make or mar the school. The most perfect organization and most ideal curriculum, in the hands of ignorant, narrow, or indifferent instructors, will become not far from valueless. The most meagre resources, on the contrary, will perform a wonderful work of education if wielded by broad-minded, well-taught men and women who have the teaching zeal.

A well-trained teacher ought, of course, to be familiar with pedagogic methods; but he should be their master, not their slave. Details of organization, method, discipline, curriculum, should be to him simply a means of education, not an end. Yet these things — method, organization, curriculum — loom largest in the training of the average teacher; and by his skill in handling these tools of teaching, not by his power as a moulder of men, the schoolmaster is too often judged. It is quite generally agreed that the chief function of the college and the university is to give men larger views of life, greater command of themselves,

higher motives of conduct. None needs this wider outlook, this self-command, this ethical motive, more than he who is to develop the minds and characters of children. To neglect, therefore, to reach in the fullest possible degree this great body of teachers is for the college to lose its finest opportunity.

Because the teacher needs and the college can give breadth, outlook, the fundamentals of larger life and activity, those higher institutions should not, in laying out their courses for the professional training of the teacher, address themselves too minutely to questions of method and details of curriculum. They will be at fault, too, if, because of their new interest in elementary and secondary education, they attempt to look too closely into the workings of public school teaching and to influence too directly the development of methods and curricula therein. Those are questions to be solved by school-teachers, not by college professors. And the heaviest and most harmful pressure which the college can put upon those who are working out those problems is practically to dictate what shall be taught in the preparatory schools by prescribing fixed requirements for entrance. One of the best results of a fuller awakening of the colleges to their duty in the matter of training teachers will be a simultaneous arousing of them to the fact that they should not ask, from the secondary schools, candidates drilled and redrilled in a certain list of studies, but that they should demand young men and women widely, variously, it may be diversely instructed, yet with their individuality developed, with their wills trained, with their minds broadened, and with their characters established.

To secure such candidates for admission to their courses, the colleges must educate those who are to teach those candidates. What waste of time in college work, what loss of

effectiveness, what stunting of results, come from the needless immaturity, the feeble will power, the dulness due to ill preparation of a large proportion of the young men who enter, only those who have to do with colleges can conceive or measure. The remedy, however, lies almost wholly with the colleges themselves. It is for them actively and immediately to concern themselves with the character and the education of the men and the women who train those college Freshmen; it is for them to begin at the beginning by training those who, in the elementary and secondary schools, lay the foundations for the educational work that the college has to do, and who, far more than this, establish the principal foundations of the social and political state.

To effect this, the colleges, whether of arts or of sciences, ought first to establish a recognized profession of teaching upon the same high and exacting plane as that of the other learned professions; second, to offer every wise inducement for intending teachers to pursue to the end these professional courses; third, to give honor and preference to those who have so recognized the dignity of teaching as really to fit themselves to be teachers. And, finally, those colleges should modify the conditions of admission to their Freshman classes so that it may be easy for one, otherwise well qualified, to come in though he have not stuffed himself with past examination papers; but so that it may not be easy for any youth to enter unless he has been truly educated by professional teachers,— by teachers, that is, who have known how to train his mind and body, how to broaden his views, how to strengthen and dignify his character.

James P. Munroe.

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